

Award Number: W81XWH-09-1-0740

TITLE: THE SOLDIER MEDIC METTLE STUDY

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REPORT DATE: October 2010

TYPE OF REPORT: Annual

PREPARED FOR: U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command
Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-10-2010	2. REPORT TYPE Annual	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) 30 SEP 2009 - 29 SEP 2010		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE THE SOLDIER MEDIC METTLE STUDY		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER 5b. GRANT NUMBER W81XWH-09-1-0740 5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER		
6. AUTHOR(S) DR. CHARLES FIGLEY figley@tulane.edu		5d. PROJECT NUMBER 5e. TASK NUMBER 5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Tulane University New Orlens, LA 70223-5406		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER		
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) US Army Medical Research and Materiel Command Ft. Detrick, MD 21702		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) 11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)		
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
14. ABSTRACT The first year has been extremely productive meeting and exceeding our goals, though fraught with challenges both external and internal to the research team. The report will first summarize our achievements and failures. Next we discuss the challenges and solutions. At the end we discuss the plans for the coming year.				
15. SUBJECT TERMS medic, resilience, mettle, combat stress				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: a. REPORT u b. ABSTRACT u c. THIS PAGE u		17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 4	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON USAMRMC 19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

Report on the First Year of the Medic Mettle Study
Charles Figley, PI (Tulane University)

The first year has been extremely productive meeting and exceeding our goals, though fraught with challenges both external and internal to the research team. The report will first summarize our achievements and failures. Next we discuss the challenges and solutions. At the end we discuss the plans for the coming year.

Summary of Achievements

The Qualitative Research Team (Cabrera, Speciale, and Figley) recruited and 9 professionally produced video interviews with 9 combat medics in January of 2010 in Germany. In addition, we interviewed 7 combat medics at Ft. Hood. From the more than 32 hour of interviews the team, using contemporary and sophisticated video interview analysis (Variable Generating Activity or VGA), the team was able to generate more than 200 important new variables and transform them into the first draft of the Medic Mettle Scale. This is extremely important since such a scale might be useful in trying to understand how and why some soldiers thrive under severe and stressful conditions while others succumb to combat-related stress injuries and disorders.

Moreover, we have presented our project in two venues (Uniformed Services University of Health Sciences) in June and at the annual conference for all funding projects like ours in July in Phoenix). We will make our first national presentation of the findings at the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies in Montreal on November 6th. This is a significant achievement since the Society is highly selective about what is accepted for presentation – especially a paper presentation in a 1.5-hour slot.

Finally, the Qualitative Research Team is working on three journal articles and expect to submit them no later than the end of the year. This is a result of face-to-face planning meetings in Germany, Texas, and New Orleans, in addition to hundreds of email exchanges.

Challenges

In addition to those discussed in the four quarterly reports, we were faced with several challenges. We have experienced numerous technical delays in the transfer of the PI from Europe to USUHS and in the wording of the initial contracts to both Tulane and the Tampa VA, which inaccurately show those sites as individual PI's of their studies. This legal/contractual problem does not allow the overall PI (MAJ Cabrera) access to financial, and other relevant study updates from the respective sites, as well as reimbursement of funds between Tulane and USU/ERMC. We continue to work toward a resolution to these problems but at the time of this report, we have not resolved the problems. Moreover, there have been additional delays due to Tulane University's grants management system that is my responsibility. I am working with the Dean of the School of Social Work to improve and overcome this situation.

Another challenge is the lack of communication and poor working relationship between the PI of the Quantitative Research Team and the Qualitative Research Team. I have complained to that PI's supervisor. As yet, there is considerable tension that has significantly affected our productivity and sense of unity and purpose.

Future Activities

We look forward to our medic mettle scale being included in the first, web-based survey scheduled for next month (for the ERMC sample). Those results will enable us to make substantial improvements in the scale and begin to focus our attention on those variables that most account for behavioral health outcomes among our sample. As a result, we hope that the first, web-based survey scheduled for May (for the Ft. Hood sample) will

include an improved version of the scale that would be appropriate for several presentations and publications.

In addition we intend to more thoroughly analyze the video data using a new software program that not only converts to a searchable and index-enabled transcript. The software may also help us track the video clips associated with the most important variables across all 16 video interviews.

We have begun work on a book on medic mettle with chapters focusing on around 10 combat medics, following introductory chapters on the history and importance of combat medics and our study findings.